



The Christian Civilization of Africa.

AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

American Colonization Society,

JANUARY 16, 1877,

BY

Hon. JOHN H. B. LATROBE.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

WASHINGTON CITY:
COLONIZATION BUILDING, 450 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE.
1877.

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PRESENTED BY

Rev. Wm. S. Perry

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ADDRESS.

MEMBERS OF THE AMERICAN COLONIZATION SOCIETY,

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

In the year 1853, Mr. Everett, addressing the Anniversary Meeting of that year, said:

“Sir: I believe that Africa will be civilized, and civilized by the descendants of those torn from the land. I believe it, because I will not think that this great fertile continent is to be forever left waste; I believe it, because I see no other agency competent to the task; I believe it, because I see in this agency a wonderful adaptation.”

It was no new thought that Mr. Everett uttered on this occasion; but, falling from his lips, these words had the weight due to his character as an acute observer, a profound thinker, an experienced statesman, and an accomplished orator.

It was a long, dim vista through which, with prophetic eye, he gazed when he uttered them. Since then, day to day, the prospect has been brightening, until, now, even the most incredulous may see the end that he foretold.

The standpoint which Mr. Everett occupied, however, commanded a far wider view than that which the earlier colonizationists enjoyed thirty-seven years before, in 1816. A thick darkness then rested upon their way, which it needed the eye of a strong and abiding faith to penetrate. Such was the faith of Finley, and Bushrod Washington, and Harper, and Randolph, and Clay, and Key, and Mercer, and many another, whose names have now become historical in connection with our cause.

The address of Mr. Everett in 1853 was made at the time when a new interest seemed about to be taken in Africa and things African. At that date, almost all that was known about the continent beyond its mere edges had been learned from Bruce and Park, Denham and Clapperton, Caillé, the Landers, and Barth. Bruce had sought the fountains of the Nile, which he fancied he had found in Abyssinia. Park had crossed the mountains from the head waters of the Gambia to the Niger; had visited Timbuctoo, and was murdered at Boussa

when descending the river in the hope of unveiling the mystery of its mouth. Caillé had made a detour from the Rio Nunez, struck and crossed the Niger high up, and reached the ocean again in Morocco. Denham and Clapperton had made their way from Tripoli across the desert, discovered the lake Tchad, and aroused attention by the publication of their travels in 1824. Lander, going north from Badagry, on the way to the lake, was taken prisoner when he reached the Niger, and, being carried by his captors down the river to the sea, became in this way the discoverer of its mouth, or many mouths, in the delta between the great Bights of Benin and Biafra. Barth, with Richardson and Overweg, crossed the desert to Timbuctoo, and traveling widely through the Niger countries, published, in 1853, by far the most elaborate and satisfactory, if not the most entertaining account that had yet appeared of Central Africa.

Since 1853 the exploration of the continent has been far more active than it ever was before, and the public interest in Africa seems to have grown in proportion.

In the last century there were but four attempts at exploration, excluding Park, whose second and most fruitful journey was in 1805. In the first quarter of the nineteenth century there were but three, including even Caillé, whose travels did not end until 1828. In the second quarter we have but five; while for the third quarter and down to this time there have been more than twenty, counting those only whose names are well known as contributors to our knowledge of the interior of Africa.

With Mr. Everett's address, or, at all events, cotemporaneous with it, may be said to have revived the spirit of African exploration.

During the period here referred to Liberia had been founded, and was growing slowly but surely, increasing, as she is still increasing, in strength, so as to become fitted some day for the destiny foretold for her—to vindicate her competency for the agency that Mr. Everett assigned to her—to prove, to use his words, “her wonderful adaptation to the work” of civilizing Africa; to do for Africa what the settlements of Plymouth and Jamestown, weaker far in their early history than Liberia has ever been, have in the end done for America; with this mighty difference, that here in America the white race has subjugated, trampled upon, and will, sooner or later, extirpate the red race that it found here, leaving it a tradition only; while the black race of Africa, “civilized,” to use again the words of Mr. Everett, “by the descendants of those torn from the land,” will have only

reason to rejoice in the numbers that leave America to find in Africa their home.

So great a result as the orator foretold is never brought about upon the instant. Long preparation precedes it always. Circumstances often apparently antagonistic are in the end found to have been, in some unexpected way, combined to produce it. In this case, a population, estimated by late writers at 199,000,000, of whom, says the same authority, scarcely one per cent. can be set down as civilized men, and little more than ten per cent. as semi-civilized even, was to be wrought upon. The mere statement of the proportion is appalling. Measure the chances of success by all past experience. Look at the fields where the labors of white missionaries have been the most encouraging. Count the number of their converts and subtract it from 199,000,000. Ask the zealous and devoted men and women who, for forty years and more, have labored on the Gaboon, on the Cavalla, and elsewhere on the continent, to enumerate their communicants, and then let us judge for ourselves what impression they are at all likely to make upon this enormous mass. And yet we all agree that this work, mighty as it is, has to be done. As philanthropists merely we would wish to believe that it will be done. As Christians, blessed with prophecy and revelation, it is our duty to believe it will be done. Then comes the constantly-recurring question, but how is it to be done? And the answer is to be made in the language which has been used as the text of this address: It is to be done by "the descendants of those torn from the land;" not by one or two, or one or two hundred white missionaries scattered here and there over Africa, like the "*rari nantes in gurgite vasto*" of Virgil, but by a missionary nation from across the sea, absorbing into itself, as the ages, if you please, roll on, those whom it came to teach. Towards such a result circumstances apparently antagonistic seem to have been tending.

Who could have imagined that, when Henry de Vasco of Portugal began to creep with his timid expeditions along the Western Coast of Africa, they would ever bear upon subjects like the present? Who could have foreseen that the slave trade, which then originated in the greed of the Portuguese adventurers, was to have an influence upon the civilization of Africa and the spread of the Gospel? Who could have predicted that even the horrors of the middle passage would tend in the same direction by arousing the feeling that put an end to the inhuman traffic, only, however, after there had been placed in America hundreds of thousands of Africans, whose descendants, by long

contact and association with the white race, would become so imbued with its characteristics as to be able to do for Africa what that race had done for them; a result which the daily intercourse of generations on generations alone seems competent to effect.

We see all this now; and looking back from the standpoint of to-day, we can follow the sequence of events and see the combination of circumstances as distinctly as we can trace the course of a river and the tributaries from many quarters that go to swell its volume upon the map.

Nor, in connection with the agency which Liberia is to have in the civilization of Africa, must we overlook a peculiarity of the people upon whom it is to operate and which makes it of so much importance. It is not to be forgotten that while Europe has developed, from within, the highest culture of which man here below seems to be susceptible; while Chinese civilization has existed from remote times; while India under its native princes, long ages before the day of Clive and Hastings, had its science and its art, and exhibited in its architecture such beauty as is illustrated in the Taj Mahal at Agra; while Mexico and Peru had made the advances that Cortes and Pizarro found there; while the same may be said of Japan that has been said of China—yet the native African is, to-day, what the paintings on Egyptian tombs represent him to have been when he figured in the processions that swelled the triumphs of the kings in whose reigns were built the pyramids, the temples, and the palaces whose ruins crowd the borders of the Nile.

Certainly, then, it is only a fair inference that, with but an inferior faculty of self-development, the civilization of Africa must come from without, and not from within, her borders. And where is it to come from, save from America—from the nation of missionaries here prepared for the purpose, “the descendants of those torn from the land?” This is the agency by which the work is to be done. And never were truer words spoken than when Mr. Everett said, “I see no other agency competent to the task; I see in this agency a wonderful adaptation.”

Looking forward to the remoteness of the end, it is as far off to-day as it was when Mr. Everett spoke. The twenty-four years that have elapsed may be counted as an hour only of the time that must intervene before all men shall admit that the great result has been accomplished. But the happening of it is not the less sure; and all that has yet taken place in this connection but strengthens, or ought to strengthen, our faith in it.

It is very true that when, in 1816, the American Colonization Society was formed, the vast majority of the descendants of these "torn from the land" in the United States were slaves, and that now there is not a single slave in all our wide domain; and there may be those who will argue that with all avocations, in all the walks of life, open to all; with the highest political distinction within the reach of all; there is far less motive for emigration than when color was a disqualifying badge in a thousand offensive ways. And the same persons may point to the high positions honorably filled by men who, twenty years ago, were either slaves or the descendants, more or less remotely, of slaves, as creating an inducement to remain in America more potent than any that formerly existed.

The argument on these grounds is a weak one. The closer the assimilation which contact and association for generations on generations have brought about between the two races in those characteristics which fit men to influence men in the interests of civilization, the more capable is the Africo-American of taking upon himself the work that is yet to be performed in Africa—the wider the field opened to his ambition in a land where, free from the overshadowing competition of a different race, he may do the work which he and his are alone competent to perform. That he will perform it, all things seem to indicate in the preparations that have so long been going forward. Among these not the least important and significant are the explorations that have been extending our knowledge of the continent and its people. They have shown that in no part of the globe are the treasures of the mine, the soil, and the forest more abundant; while nowhere else has nature been more prodigal of beauty; and the journeyings of Speke, and Burton, and Grant, and Livingstone, and Schweinfurth, and Cameron, and Stanley have created an interest in Africa before unfelt; and, to-day, the return of Stanley is anticipated by thousands as letting on still more the light of day, so to speak, upon what has been the dark interior of this quarter of the globe.

It is only within a few months that one of the most intelligent and enlightened monarchs of Europe convened in Brussels a Congress of geographers, men of science, distinguished African travelers, and others, with a view to the concentration of effort in this direction, so that exploration might be carried on, not sporadically, but upon a system having especial regard to this great matter of civilization. It was with profound regret that the speaker found himself unable to accept the invitation that his office of President of the American Colonization

Society, no doubt, procured for him, to be present at the meeting at Brussels on the 11th September last, as the guest of King Leopold, if for no other reason than because he lost the opportunity of expressing, and elaborating, and justifying, as he has endeavored to do this evening, the views that have been made the subject of this address.

Should it be said that the scant numbers that of late years the Society has sent to Liberia is not encouraging in this connection; the answer is, that there has been no want of applicants to go there. The Society could have sent six thousand who are on its list, had it possessed the means to send them. And if it is then said, that this very want of means is indicative of an indifference on the part of the public which is inconsistent with that increase of interest in Africa which has now been dwelt upon, it may be answered that African colonization must, as a matter of course, be independent, as regards its great ultimate results, of the means to be furnished by a philanthropic association, no matter how ample its endowment. African colonization differs in nowise from any other colonization—eastern from China to America, or western from Europe to our shores. It depends, as do all others, upon the attractions of the new home, the repulsions of the old one, or upon both combined; and when it does take place it must, like that which now takes place from Europe to America, be voluntary and self-paying, crossing the ocean over the bridge that commerce makes for it. The function of the American Colonization Society has been to build up in Africa a nation possessing such attractions, capable of self support, of self-government, civilized and Christian, recognized as a member of the great family of nations through honorable treaties, and having the sympathy of the whole civilized world, as well on account of its origin as for its purpose and its destiny. This the Society believes that it has accomplished; until now, as the fruit of 160 voyages, upon which no vessel has been injured by wind or wave, not one lost by shipwreck, it has received in Liberia 20,820 of the descendants of those torn from the land; an English-speaking people, whose Government is modeled after our own, and whose success has vindicated beyond all question the ability of the Afro-American to maintain in Africa an honorable nationality, capable of the amplest development in all the best qualities of civilization.

That this will have the attraction that will in the end make Liberia the mother of a great missionary nation, all things seem to promise; and the end can no more be stayed by the condition of the Society's treasury, this year or the next, than can the succession of

the years themselves be affected by the sunlights or the shadows of their seasons as they roll.

There is a time for all things; a fullness of time, when all things become fit for the event that is to take place. It may be hastened or retarded, but its coming cannot be prevented. All history has shown this, and illustrations from history might be multiplied indefinitely; and were gold to be found now, as explorations already made in Liberia indicate that before long it will be, within as easy reach of Monrovia as the mines of California were within reach of the western States of the Union, or as those of Australia were within reach of the inhabitants of Melbourne, there would be no need of resorting to the treasury of the Society to meet the expenses of emigration.

Nor is Liberia to depend upon the *sacra fames auri* alone for its growth and prosperity. There are causes at work of a very different description, and which will continue to operate until the intercourse between Africa and America shall become as active as that between Europe and America, affording facilities for an emigration eastward as great as any that ever came westward to our shores.

Ingenuity has gone even beyond the demands of an increasing and ever-exacting civilization. The looms and the forges and the workshops of Europe and America produce more than the consumers of Europe and America and the other known markets of the world can pay for. All markets are glutted with their products. New markets must be found, or the whirl of the spindle, the blast of the furnace, and the ring of the anvil must cease, and those dependent upon them must suffer. When starvation marches close behind the competition that produces cheapness, starvation will catch up as soon as cheapness ceases to tempt consumption. In a word, to leave the figurative for the fact, new markets are rapidly becoming a necessity. England feels this, and with the wise forecast of her statesmanship has for years been laboring to provide for it. Comparatively speaking, the only virgin market of the world, to-day, is Africa. America, too, has been sensible of it; and the emigrants of the Society are taken to Liberia now by the merchant-traders from New York; and the readiest means of communicating with Monrovia or Cape Palmas is by way of England by two lines of steamers which sail from Liverpool continuing their voyages along the Coast as far east as the Bight of Benin.

When the territory, now Liberia, was purchased from the native kings by Commodore Stockton and Dr. Eli Ayres in 1821, nothing

of all this was anticipated. There had been, as we have seen, no exploration of Africa, no spirit of exploration, no King of Belgium to concentrate and systematize such a spirit. The most profitable article of African produce was man. The most active trader along the Coast of Liberia was the slave ship. The mills of England had ample markets to which to send their manufactures. The mills of America had scarcely an existence. A steam-engine had not long ceased to be a curiosity. But look around to-day. How vast, how wondrous, how unexampled the change. Its details it were idle to particularize. Our subject is Africa; and it is in connection with Africa only that these things are referred to. Whatever their influence in other directions, their tendency unquestionably is to bring about the day when America shall in some sort pay the debt she owes to Africa in the fitness which "the descendants of those torn from the land" have acquired during their long and weary servitude—to spread over this vast continent as a thrice-blessed garment, civilization and the gospel, fulfilling wisely and beneficently all the duties of the agency which, to recur again to the words of Mr. Everett, is alone "competent to the task."

Not single heralds now go forth
 To earn Thy smiles' reward—
 To preach Thy law, proclaim Thy word,
 Redeemer, Saviour, Lord;
 But, bursting through the thrall of years
 Their fathers' home to gain,
 A nation, now, exultant bears
 Thy truth beyond the main.

